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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BELGRADE 001752

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FROM AMBASSADOR POLT FOR SPECIAL ENVOY FRANK WISNER, USOP
PLEASE PASS

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SUBJECT: SERBIA AND KOSOVO: WISNER VISIT TO BELGRADE
10/31/06

Classified By: Ambassador Michael C. Polt for reasons 1.4b and d

The Lay of the Land

11. (C) Frank, Serbian politics have gone into high gear since your last visit to Belgrade in late July, and every politician is now in election mode. Although Prime Minister Kostunica and President Tadic have both improved their poll numbers by appearing to work together, it is the Prime Minister who is driving the agenda in Belgrade. Kostunica has skillfully corralled all the major democratic parties (as well as the Radicals) to support a Constitution that promises to force everyone onto his Kosovo platform through a referendum process that leaves him a great degree of say about when to have elections and how to choreograph them.

12. (C) Reformist hopes, as you know, lie with the President and his DS party. But so far, Tadic is either unwilling or unable to stand up to Kostunica on any significant issue. He has still not succeeded in forcing Kostunica to agree to concurrent Presidential and Parliamentary elections in December, a combination that would boost his party's seats and give him a stronger hand in forming the next government. But just as significantly, he has wavered on confirming the progressive and pro-western Acting Chief of the General Staff, an appointment that is his alone to make. Tadic's staff tell us that Kostunica controls levers that prevent him from moving on this now -- levers that will be in Tadic's hands after parliamentary elections.

13. (C) Not only did the Constitution save the government from falling (coalition member G-17 has formally submitted resignations), but Kostunica is increasingly playing the Kosovo card in calling on Serbs to support it (despite the fact that a reputable polling agency showed that the Kosovo issue is the primary motivator for only 10 percent of those who say they will vote for the Constitution.)

14. (C) Kostunica has still not made a final decision on when to hold parliamentary elections, but DSS Party elders are now claiming in public that it will not be later than January 12007. Much depends on the outcome of the Constitutional referendum and the ability of the International Community to stand firm on its timelines. At the end of the day, Kostunica's options are somewhat limited: his governing

majority is in question and none of the major parties, all of which supported the referendum, can afford to hold up a Constitutional law that in November will officially confirm the results of the referendum and set dates for follow-on elections - sometime soon. Moreover the key Constitutional law requires a two-thirds majority - i.e., it cannot be passed without the support of the Radicals, who are in no hurry for elections before a Kosovo settlement. If the referendum fails -- not likely but possible -- all bets are off on what comes next.

15. (C) Your visit to Belgrade is well-timed -- you can help remove the GOS-cultivated ambiguity over UNOSEK's Kosovo timetable. Kostunica claims he has received assurances of support from Moscow and Beijing for Serbia's stance on Kosovo, and the well reported rumblings from EU capitals -- most notably Rome -- are feeding a perception with voters here that the Kosovo status decision may be delayed and altered. The Prime Minister, buoyed by his success in orchestrating domestic political forces, appears confident that he can similarly steer the international community away from an independent Kosovo by exploiting perceived divisions within the EU and Contact Group. Some suspect that Kostunica will agree to early parliamentary elections, but will stall on presidentials in a bid to entice the international community into further delaying a Kosovo settlement.

16. (C) In addition to reaffirming our commitment to the Contact Group timeline, you should also remind leaders here of their responsibility to avoid provocation and maintain calm. Your discussion with political parties and civic leaders can help stimulate a discussion on how to help foster a less emotional and more constructive discussion of the Kosovo issue and to concentrate Serbia's future. This will

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also help me with the "K 1" program we have launched here to deal with the run-up and aftermath of the Kosovo settlement in Serbia. K 1 focuses -- as Dan did when he visited in late September -- on tangible commitments to working with Serbia's democrats on making the country a more stable and prosperous member of a modern, democratic Europe.

Your meetings, Your messages

17. (C/Rel Serbia) I recommend the following messages:

With the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister:

-- Reaffirm USG resolve to keep to Contact Group schedule, irrespective of the domestic political timetable.

-- Reiterate unequivocal support for Ahtisaari and his UNOSEK team under CG guidance.

-- Inform on plans (as much as you can) to make status outcome clear in our decisions and public statements by the end of the year.

-- Reinforce the commitment by the Contact Group to hold Serbian and Kosovar leaders responsible for any destabilization by Serbs or Albanians in Kosovo.

-- Reassure on our commitment to ensure decentralization outcome provides the appropriate guarantees on rights for Serbs, including especially on cultural and religious issues.

-- Inform on themes from meetings in Pristina as appropriate.

-- Urge realistic engagement with us now and after elections on helping Serbia move ahead.

With Serbian Orthodox Church leaders:

-- Thank them for continuing engagement with the Kosovo status process.

-- Inform on meetings with Teodosije as appropriate.

-- Reassure that UNOSEK has taken church's concerns into account during this process, and that the rights of the Church in Kosovo will be protected.

-- Urge them to call for Serbs ("your flock") to stay in Kosovo and for Serbians in Serbia to engage positively with the international community whatever the Kosovo outcome.

For Your Meeting with Political Party Leaders

We have stopped trying to shift leaders' public stance on Kosovo, a futile exercise. In the months ahead we will remain focused on the future of US-Serbia relations, implementing the Secretary's intention to speed Serbia into Europe. For these meetings, I recommend a realistic but future-oriented message that can speak to both our resolve on Kosovo and collaboration for the future. The following would be appropriate:

-- We will support the democratic parties against the radicals and socialists.

-- We will not exclude any democratic party from this process. We will also increase our support for smaller parties that are actively supporting a more realistic and constructive discussion of Kosovo. We will be careful that our efforts supporting GOTV and civic society initiatives, and our public messages open the discussion about responsible alternatives.

-- We respect the challenges faced by your leaders at this

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difficult moment in this difficult year and do not expect you or your leaders to reverse their public Kosovo policy. However, on a practical level you need to adapt to the situation -- if Kosovo Serb rights are assured and they remain in Kosovo, this means Serbia has not "lost."

-- Some have suggested that the Constitution is in part a political move used to prevent implementation of a positive vision -- to commit Serbia to a rejectionist position well into the future.

-- We will continue to remind all our democratic friends that there is a way to deal responsibly with disagreements without trapping Serbia in a dead-end and isolationist policy.

-- Your Constitution could be used to do either. We hope the right decisions are taken. But ultimately managing this crisis will be a test for Serbia's leadership. You will be shaping the future environment to either complicate or facilitate the task of building a more modern, prosperous and European Serbia.

For your B-92 Interview

-- We respect the challenges faced by Serbia in this difficult year.

-- There will be a Kosovo settlement soon and both Belgrade and Pristina will have to adapt and work positively with the outcome.

-- Some on both sides of the ABL may be tempted to prevent

implementation of a positive vision whatever the settlement. We are resolved to assist those who want to work for a positive future for Serbia, including Kosovo and the whole region.

-- We will continue to remind all our democratic friends that there is a way to deal responsibly with disagreements.

-- We hope the right decisions are taken. But ultimately shaping their own future will be a task for the Serbian people.

-- Clearly, there is a choice. You can either complicate or facilitate the task of building a more modern, prosperous and European Serbia.

A Final Word -----

18. (C) The bottom line: We need to inject certainty on the Kosovo outcome directly into the calculations of Serbian politicians and opinion-makers while continuing to encourage reform elements to manage the end game constructively. A referendum and looming elections simply do not change that reality. As you well know, we are not talking about asking for their support on final status, but rather to step up to the plate and show some strong leadership that will preserve Serbia's future.

Cheers, Mike
POLT